

Three-Star Rookie in Big-League Intelligence



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CIA Chief Aware That Mistakes May Spell Disaster

By John Scali

General Walter Bedell Smith, a rugged soldier-diplomat who knows the Russians first hand, is well on the way to revamping and streamlining the Government's secret intelligence operations.

If his mission as director of the Central Intelligence Agency succeeds, the Nation can expect a clearer picture of what Russia, or any potential enemy, is plotting.

If he should flop, his explanation, if any, might be drowned out in the roar of world-wide war.

The general, now 56, has tackled many a tough chore for his Government since the day he enlisted in the Indiana National Guard at the age of 15.

After rising from the ranks, he served with outstanding success as Gen. Eisenhower's chief of staff during the last war from the earliest stages until the victorious Allied armies forced Hitler's legions to surrender.

Later, at the President's request, he doffed his Army khaki and went to Moscow to serve as American Ambassador, one of the most important assignments in the diplomatic service. His achievements from 1946 to 1949 won him the praise and respect of the State Department.

Despite this impressive record it's doubtful that "Beetle," as his friends call him, has ever faced a more pressing assignment, or one in which the odds are stacked so high against him from the very beginning.

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Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Bernard M. Baruch, as they appeared before a Senate committee. —Harris-Ewing Photo.

His predecessor, Rear Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, returned to active naval duty in accordance with his wishes. True to the CIA's secrecy traditions, he never replied to the attacks on him or his agency.

"Beetle" took on the job knowing he was no great intelligence expert. During his distinguished Army career, he was primarily a foot soldier; one who stood out because of his grim determination and his almost instinctive ability to brush aside detail and hit the heart of a problem.

But he had a good working knowledge of the intelligence problems of both diplomats and generals from long Army service

responsible for "political intelligence." Gen. Smith has surrendered that function solely to the State Department and eliminated duplicating activities in CIA.

2. Channeled CIA's main efforts toward a single goal—producing detailed "national intelligence estimates" which concentrate on trying to evaluate the capabilities and intentions of a potential enemy.

3. Changed the tactics CIA pursues in gathering and writing its reports—"for the better" in the view of most Government agencies which deal with CIA.

4. Buoyed the morale of CIA employes and Government

'Beetle' Smith Has Had Some Tough Jobs, But None Like This

best information on a specific problem but also state what the "facts" mean to the welfare and security of the United States.

Often it means CIA must take the risk of judging the intent of a potential enemy on the basis of the information it has been able to piece together—a process which can and does expose the general to the possibility of being proved a phony prophet.

An estimate of "intent" is given when CIA is convinced it has nearly all of the pieces of the puzzle at hand. When it honestly believes it can't determine "intent" it will say so rather than risk dressing up a hunch or guess as considered opinion.

CIA's new national estimates seem to have the support of all Government intelligence agencies now. In the past the State Department, at least, criticized them frequently on the grounds they were incomplete and misleading.

This behind-the-scenes criticism stemmed mostly from the technique CIA used at that time to write them. Sometimes they were written within CIA and then sent to the various Government intelligence departments for their concurrence or dissent. An agency was expected to object only when an estimate, in its view, was dangerously misleading.

Beetle has reversed the procedure. Experts from each intelligence department in the Government participate in writing national estimates from the very beginning.

Down to Cases

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authority for assessing and processing political information has helped restore peace and harmony between the State Department and CIA.

Secretary Acheson and his intelligence chief, W. Parke Armstrong, a former Army intelligence expert, had always maintained that the State Department, with its thousands of diplomats scattered throughout the world, was better equipped to handle the work.

"Beetle's" predecessors kept a good-sized staff of "political experts" whose main task was to check the accuracy of political information which the State Department sent to CIA.

The general and his top aides decided this was an unnecessary duplication and promptly eliminated CIA's more detailed work in this field.

Given Broad Scope

An important, although tiny, fraction of the information CIA receives comes from secret agents who are planted in key areas of the world.

This is the most secret part of any intelligence operation, and American officials are understandably tight-lipped about it.

Presumably these secret agents are responsible to CIA.

Presumably they include experts ranging from atomic scientists to economic and military specialists.

And presumably the general supervises their work. Congress has given him authority to perform "such additional services of common concern as the National Security Council determines can be more efficiently

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Despite this impressive record it's doubtful that "Beetle," as his friends call him, has ever faced a more pressing assignment, or one in which the odds are stacked so high against him from the very beginning.

Under the best conditions, trying to figure out what the Russians are apt to do, either directly or through their faithful Communist satellites, is a hazardous, uncertain business.

Drafted by Truman

To make the general's task even more difficult, the United States ranks as a rookie in the big league of intelligence.

It was only three years ago that Congress somewhat reluctantly authorized the administration to create a peacetime Central Intelligence Agency. Until then the Government's various departments had gathered their own intelligence and swapped it back and forth on a hit-or-miss basis.

"Now we are trying to do in a big hurry and in time of crisis what it has taken the British some 300 years to accomplish," says one key Government intelligence expert.

President Truman drafted "Beetle" to take over his new job last October 7. At that time critics were still lambasting Central Intelligence with charges that it failed to warn the Government in time of North Korean Communist plans to launch a military invasion of South Korea.

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and his tour as Ambassador to Moscow.

Realizing he needed expert advice, he asked William H. Jackson, a New York lawyer, to become his deputy. He didn't even know Jackson personally, but knew that he had served as a colonel in Army intelligence under Gen. Bradley during the war.

And Jackson had spent months in 1948 as part of a three-man team, working under orders of the National Security Council, seeking to find out what was wrong with American intelligence.

He then persuaded Allen Dulles, a second member of the investigating team, to desert his law practice, too, and join CIA as a top consultant.

Mr. Dulles is a brother of John Foster Dulles, Secretary Acheson's Republican foreign policy adviser. During the war he served as one of the most successful "field men" in the wartime Office of Strategic Services. He has been branded as a "spy" by Radio Moscow.

For his top administrator, and custodian of CIA's purse strings, Gen. Smith selected another New Yorker Murray McConnell, a man who had earned a reputation in the business world for his ability to take over a bankrupt company and put it on its financial feet.

Once he was satisfied with his staff, the general began to reorganize CIA. Using the recommendations of the three-man committee as a blueprint, he has moved quickly and decisively.

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3. Changed the tactics CIA pursues in gathering and writing its reports—"for the better" in the view of most Government agencies which deal with CIA.

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Perhaps the most important change "Beetle" has made is to start producing the new national intelligence estimates. More than a dozen of these top-secret documents have been compiled thus far.

These booklets are published by CIA after exhaustive conferences with the six Government departments that have intelligence sections—the State, Army, Navy and Air Force Departments, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Top Government officials who have seen them describe them as excellent. Even the subject matter is "classified," but it's reasonable to assume CIA put out at least one estimate attempting to predict the intention of the Chinese Communists toward Korea.

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If any one dissents, on any grounds, his dissent is included in the report. There is no attempt, officials say, to whittle a report down to something everybody will agree to.

The general has changed not only the way his estimates are prepared and written but also the purpose behind them. A national estimate, he has ruled, must devote itself to a broad problem which can't be assessed or evaluated adequately by a single department.

Further, he holds, it should deal with an immediate question the answer to which will help the highest Government officials in their day-to-day work.

"We don't get detailed dissertations on the political situation in some relatively unimportant country from CIA any more, but we do get reports on what the Russians are doing and planning—which is an awful lot more important," is the way one official sums it up.

Under "Beetle's" new plan of action, a report and analysis of the political situation in Afghanistan, for example, is the job of the State Department's political intelligence experts not for CIA.

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In the end, the accuracy of CIA's final reports on a potential enemy's preparedness for war and his intentions will be no stronger than the raw materials these agencies feed to CIA.

If one or more should fall down on the job, then CIA is almost certain to fail, no matter how good a reorganization and co-ordination job "Beetle" does. And the result could spell disaster for the United States.

(Distributed by the Associated Press.)

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